

The Signal Corps: yesterday, today, tomorrow



**the Army
Communicator**

Voice of the Signal Corps



The legend of the Song of the Signal Corps

Part I

This is a legend of a service song which was embraced by the officers, men and women, of the Signal Corps from its "adoption" by the Corps in 1927 until it was abandoned at the beginning of the Vietnam conflict in 1961, and of its tribulations and successes during its 34 years of active service. The story reiterates the importance of music in the service, discusses a former Signal Corps unit with its own glorious lineage, and describes events in the course of Signal Corps, U.S. Army, and national history.

Lt. Col. Gustave E. Vitt, U.S. Army retired

Given that it is well known and accepted that our mental nature (soul) is, more or less, affected by music; that the great factors of music affect our intellectual and emotional faculties; and by affecting one of these faculties the other is affected, we can conclude that martial airs such as regimental, branch and corps songs, and soldier ballads have a significant role in the development and maintenance of morale of the total Army. When our heart pulse is slightly quickened, we become "excited" or "in good spirits." When we feel "low" or "depressed in spirit," it may be said that there has been a slowing of the heart pulse. In martial music, the dominant factor is rhythm. Rhythm can affect our emotional nature instantaneously for it affects our heart pulsations by means of sympathetic vibrations. Melody, lyric poems and harmony affect our higher nature, or intellect, because they present an ideal representation to our mind. Consequently, music has had, and still has its influence and special mission in all known armies. It is not merely to charm the ear, but also to touch the heart and elevate the mind to conceive an ideal to which one aspires. It is this natural phenomenon which motivates an individual's esprit de corps.¹

Martial music, with its appropriate rhythm, idealistic lyric, and inspiring melody, has traditionally performed a

major role in the manifestation of unit pride and integrity, competitive proficiency toward excellence, and self-dedication to purpose in all the armies of the world — from the bawdy songs of Caesar's armies during campaigns of the Gallic War (58 to 52 B.C.) to the present time.

The most outstanding example of a stirring military song that can be offered under any standard is Brig. Gen. (then Lt.) Edmund L. Gruber's Field Artillery Song which was inspired by an incident that occurred during a difficult march across the Zambales Mountains by the second battalion, Fifth Field Artillery, in the Philippine Islands in 1907. Gruber was sent with an advance detachment ahead of the battalion to select the route and prepare stream crossings, etc. The following April, 1908, Gruber was asked to write a song that would symbolize the spirit of the reunited regiment when the first battalion arrived from the States to relieve the second. Drawing from his experiences during the recon trip, he wrote the Field Artillery Song. Needless to say, it has undergone many changes in words and music since it was first sung at Camp Stotsenburg, P.I. Like the Song of the Signal Corps, it was not published until a number of years after adoption, when it was published as "The Caisson Song." No wonder the melody of this simple but lasting and inspiring song was designated as the chorus of

the official song of the U.S. Army — "The Army Goes Rolling Along." Other examples of serious, spirited martial songs which have endured and live on are the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" (1862), and "The Marine's Hymn" (1918). On the lighter side, the soldiers of 1917-1918 gave us "Hinky, Dinky, Parley-Voo."²

MUSIC IN THE 1920 POSTWAR ARMY

The value of musical heraldry and soldier singing was realized by the War Department during World War I, when song books were prepared and distributed by the Commission on Training Camp Activities. Thousands of pieces of band music were purchased and hundreds of song leaders were scattered throughout the camps. Like modern day USO shows, thousands of soldiers gathered for band concerts, entertainment and singing in unison, to bolster their morale. Singing to the tune of the "Old Gray Mare," they'd serenade the Signalmen with:

Oh! Uncle Sammy, he needs the
Signal Corps.
Wigway and semaphore,
He gets them by the score.
And the, by jing, we're off for a
foreign shore.
Good-by, Kaiser Bill!

Many long years ago,
 Many long years ago.
 Oh, the Signal Corps it ain't what it
 used to be,
 Ain't what it used to be,
 Ain't what is used to be.
 The Signal Corps it ain't what it used
 to be,
 Many long years ago.

With the signing of the First World War Armistice, the Signal Corps, like other Army and governmental branches, was required to demobilize. This reduction in force cut the Signal Corps drastically, to a strength below that authorized before the war, presenting the Corps with a very difficult problem. The demand for telephone and other signal services did not diminish at a rate at all proportional to the decrease in military personnel, and a heavy burden was placed upon the Signal Corps at a time when personnel changes were frequent and the morale of the Army was generally low.

The 1920 Reorganization Act revised the entire Signal Corps force structure. It reduced organic Infantry and Cavalry Division Signal battalions to companies and a troop, and it made all unit commanders below the division level responsible for their own communications through assignment of communication duties to their branch personnel as additional duties. The structure of the postwar (1920) Army left scarcely any Signal Corps Units under control of the Chief Signal Officer. It wiped out most of the tactical interest of the Signal Corps and moved the center of gravity away from classification as an "Arm" and toward classification as a "Service." This was a further blow to the morale of the Signal Corps. By 1921, the strength of the entire Signal Corps was fixed at 300 officers and 3,000 enlisted men. The Army, in general, was having the same postwar problems.

The story of the Song of the Signal Corps and the Signal Corps March begins in 1923, when the Secretary of War announced his desire that all regimental commanders and chiefs of branches and corps encourage in every way the composition and adoption of a song, which should deal with the past exploits and achievements of their organization. The Adjutant General's directive, file AG 007.13, subject: Regimental Songs, dated 14 Dec 1923,

implements and clarifies an earlier policy statement of 17 July 1923. All TAG directives carried the command line "By Order of the Secretary of War."

Receipt of the SECWAR directive coincided with the arrival of a new Chief Signal Officer, Major General Charles McK. Saltzman, Jr., (January 1924) who vigorously supported the search for a corps song. As a former head of a Signal Corps subsidiary branch—the Air Service—he believed we had the makings for a good corps song, and that a corps song would help bring the corps into a close family. His office took two routes to implement the SECWAR's desires. One included a call through an item in a monthly bulletin entitled, The Signal Corps Bulletin No. 24, dated February 1, 1924, which was given Signal Corps-wide distribution. The other was a WD OCSigO letter to all Corps Area and Department Signal Officers, file 007-Music, subject: Signal Corps Song, dated 11 February 1924 (Departments: Hawaii, Panama, etc.). The Corps Area Headquarters forwarded the CSigO letter to the National Guard and ROTC institutions of their respective status. Signal sections of the General Depots were also contacted.

A search of the "old Army Records" in the National Archives located seven responses from Corps Area Signal Offices and one from the Chicago Quartermaster Intermediate Depot-Signal Section, conveying seven sets of lyric poems but no original music. Three were set to old tunes. Four made no suggestion as to music since the TAG directive volunteered the Army Music School as musical advisor. One candidate availed himself of that assistance and later related his entry to H.M.S. PINAFORE instead of the French National Air, "The Marseillaise." According to a later letter from the OCSigO, "Numerous contributions have been received and some time will elapse before decision is reached on the matter." The lapse turned out to be three years.

The composition and adoption of an original piece of music to symbolize a military organization is second in importance to the rhythm or meter of the tune. While the words are almost equally as important as the music, it is an historical fact that the music will be performed many, many times more often in military organizations to identify units, to arouse esprit de corps

and to heighten the spirit of an occasion than will be the performance of the words and music, or of the words alone. The March is the customary form of regimental songs, and often the music is twice as long as the lyrics.

The absence of original, inspiring musical compositions to accompany the lyrics being received, and the standing SECWAR requirement to adopt and submit a corps song for approval created a command problem within OCSigO. This lack of musical compositions was probably an unintentional, self-imposed problem because the notices soliciting inputs stated, "The adoption of a tune is the most important feature. It does not necessarily have to be a tune specially composed, inasmuch as almost all college songs are familiar tunes much older than the college." This lack of musical compositions brought the Signal Corps Song project to an impasse.

Recognizing that the general call, issued in the Signal Corps Bulletin No. 24 of 1 Feb 1924, had failed to produce useful results, Maj. Gen. Saltzman resorted to more direct and personal lines of communication to produce a Signal Corps Song.

To imply that the Chief Signal Officer of the Army had nothing more pressing than the composition of a corps song on his mind during this postwar transition period would be ludicrous. However, the record shows he did interject himself into the program. Saltzman knew Mrs. Dawson Olmstead, wife of then Maj. Olmstead, assigned to the Department Signal Office in Hawaii, had formal training in music and was an accomplished pianist, so he sought her assistance.

On 8 January 1927, Olmstead sent a radiogram to Saltzman reading, "Mailing words and music new Signal Corps Song composed by Mrs. Olmstead. Olmstead".

Since the Army Music School had been designated as the review authority for the regimental songs program and since the first band arrangement of the Song of the Signal Corps is credited to WO T. Darcy of the Army Music School, it is evident that the Chief Signal Officer forwarded the Olmstead "Song of the Signal Corps" to the Music School for approval in accordance with the TAG letter.

The lyrics to the first version follow.

Dedicated to the U.S. Signal Corps

Vocal Lead Sheet

Song Of The Signal Corps

Arranged by Mayhew Lake

Words and Music by
BESS HEATH OLMSTEAD

March (with spirit)

Shout out the slo-gan of the Sig - nal Corps: "Get the mes-sage through."

Fight till our en - e - mies can fight no more: That's what we've
got to do. We'll pack walk - ie - talk - ies and set up poles.
Splice up our ca - bles, shot full of holes, And don't try to stop us while we're
out to fight for the Red and the White and the Blue. When the

CHORUS
dough-boys hike on the hard turn-pike, we'll be there to guide the way;
When the big guns roll t'ward their far off goal we will fol-low them day by
day From a thous-and sta-tions we call the na-tions from Green-land's
moun-tains to the South seashore For the sun can't set on our short wave net: That's the
While there's work to do, we will see it through: That's the
boast of the Sig - nal Corps. When you
pledge of the Sig - nal Corps.

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SONG OF THE SIGNAL CORPS

By Mrs. Dawson Olmstead

(8 Jan 1927)

1.

In the time of war, no matter where you are,
There you'll find the Signal Corps!
When the long lines file, weary mile by mile,
They're the ones who are at the fore
When there's big news coming, and buzzers humming.
When Springfields rattle and the big guns roar,
With a flash and flare, over land and air,
Comes the word: That's the Signal Corps.

2.

In the time of peace, our duties never cease,
There is drill and work to spare.
In the field we go, with our radio,
And we talk thru the empty air
From our short wave stations, we call the nations,
From Greenland's mountains to the South Sea shore.
Every day we say, we're in the Corps to stay,
"See the world with the Signal Corps."

3.

(Added later)

When the doughboys hike
On the hard turnpike
We'll be there, to show the way;
When the big guns roll
Toward their far-off goal
We will follow them, day by day.
From a thousand stations
We call the nations
From Greenland's mountains to the South Sea shore,
For the sun can't set
On our short-wave net;
That's the boast of the Signal Corps!

At the March 1927 Signal Corps dinner dance in Washington, D.C., a "good dance orchestra" played the Song of the Signal Corps while the entire gathering sang the words from mimeographed hand-outs. Saltzman later wrote that, "the entire gathering was enthusiastic and found the song to have pep and swing, and better still, its own distinctive charm." He continued, "Were this a Washington Signal Corps song only, we would say we had something very close to our ideal; we would be inclined to rest with it 'as is.' We want to adopt, however, not a song tried out by a few enthusiasts, but a song

tested by the entire Corps — one that will be hummed in the radio hut at Wiseman, Alaska, or on the Beach at Waikiki; sung in Panama, Manila, Fort Monmouth, Fort Sam Houston, and everywhere Signalmen go. Perhaps we have the song here now, without change or addition. Mrs. Olmstead says she is not sure about that; so far, she has been the only critic of her song. She says it can be improved and suggests that all members of the Corps contribute thought and talent to that end."

On 19 April 1927, Saltzman forwarded a copy of Mrs. Olmstead's song as an enclosure to a personal letter to all Signal Corps officers in the Army. In his rather lengthy letter he pointed out Mrs. Olmstead's suggested weaknesses and stated, "It is hoped that these suggestions will be acted upon without delay and that we can very soon adopt a song to fill our needs, a song which the entire Corps will enjoy singing and of which it will be proud. I wish you would try it out; think about it and send in, as soon as practical, all impressions and suggestions."

In the meantime, the relatively small Signal Corps was being further reduced to a new authorized strength of 268 officers and 2,165 enlisted men. Many of our now-famous leaders of that era were striving to improve the morale and posture of the Corps to meet the requirements of anticipated communication electronics technological breakthroughs, which they knew would be applicable to military operations. Examples of some of these then potential aids to combat operations were radio intelligence and radar.

By September 1927, responses to Saltzman's letter and the Song of the Signal Corps were being received from every echelon of the Army — from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of War and the Office of the Chief of Staff of the Army to Carnegie Tech, Ohio State and the Army Industrial College, as well as from many of the Army commands, schools, and so on.

A summary of the replies found in the National Archives shows that:

- 85% voted to adopt the music;
- 75% voted to adopt the words;
- 3 replies contained new verses;
- 1 provided letter and cord diagrams for ukelele, banjo and guitar;
- 1 submitted a simplified piano accompaniment to the melody;

I suggested the "G" above the staff in fifth last measure from the end was too high for male voices.

By the end of 1927, the Olmstead Song of the Signal Corps was "adopted" by the Signal Corps without further ado, and it began what became a flourishing lineage as a Service song. Sometime in 1927, Mrs. Olmstead is reported to have registered the Song of the Signal Corps' words and music with the Copyright Office as an unpublished work. It should be pointed out here that the War Department's purpose for designating the Army Music School as the review authority was to provide a focal point for technical assistance, and to avoid duplications between the branches during their song writing efforts. This step was completed and sometime later the Song of the Signal Corps, in its original key and composition, but with an added chorus, was printed in the "Army Song Book," which was compiled by The Adjutant General's office in collaboration with the Library of Congress and published by order of the Secretary of War. It is evident that this was the method employed by the War Department to announce the Service songs. Also, note that the Copyright Office is an agency of the Library of Congress.

In the next issue of TAC, Lt. Col. Vitt pursues the story of "The Song of the Signal Corps" through the 1930's, WWII and Korea to its apparent abandonment in 1961. TAC addendum to his article briefly examines the current "official preferred" Signal Corps song.



Lt. Col. Gustave E. Vitt has had a long and interesting career. He is a fourth generation Army Bandleader. The tradition began with his great-grandfather who was appointed Bandleader to the 8th Infantry Regiment at Ft. Thomas, Kentucky, in 1853. Vitt graduated from the Army Music School as a PFC in 1927 and joined the 13th Cavalry Band, where he served until it became the Signal Corps Band in August 1930. As a Major, he became Bandleader in 1940. On 1 July 1941, he became the very first musician ever to appear on television. The camera focuses on his chevrons before pulling back to reveal the entire band which then played a short program. In the same year, he left the band to enter OCS where he was part of the First Signal Corps class. He was a personal friend of Bess Heath Olmstead and her husband Maj. Gen. Dawson Olmstead. Now Lt. Vitt lives in Virginia.


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Voice of the Signal Corps

**Tactical
training:
the 80's
and
beyond**





The legend of the Song of the Signal Corps

Part II

This is a legend of a service song which was embraced by the officers, men and women, of the Signal Corps from its "adoption" by the Corps in 1927 until it was abandoned at the beginning of the Vietnam conflict in 1961, and of its tribulations and successes during its 34 years of active service. The story reiterates the importance of music in the service, discusses a former Signal Corps unit with its own glorious lineage, and describes events in the course of Signal Corps, U.S. Army, and national history.

Lt. Col. Gustave E. Vitt, U.S. Army retired

In Part I of The Legend of the Song of the Signal Corps, Vitt discussed military songs in general, the search for a Signal Corps song, and the selection of Bess Heath Olmstead's song. In Part II, he picks up the story just after WWI.

POSTWAR LEAN YEARS AND THE DEPRESSION

In 1928-31, the Chief Signal Officer was still concerned about the relatively small strength of the Signal Corps and the assignment of signal duties to the using arms; views he expressed before the Army War College in 1928. Talkie movies were introduced; then in 1929, we had the stock market crash and the ensuing depression. New permanent barracks and officers' and noncommissioned officers' quarters were being completed at Fort Monmouth, N.J., to house the largest contingent of active Army Signal units and students in the Army at that time, and the Signal Corps engineering laboratories had gotten a start. In addition to the post operating detachments (Medics, Engineers, Ordnance, Quartermaster, etc.), the 51st Signal Battalion, the 1st Signal Company (1st Div) and the 15th Signal Service Company, which comprised the instructional staff and students of the Signal School, represented the post

population. Music for this new permanent Signal Corps post was provided by a volunteer, or so-called "Jawbone Band." Its leader was SSgt. Daniel (Pop) McCarthy. The members were malassigned, special-duty musicians, individually assigned to the several units and attached to the 15th Signal Service Company. Some, like Pop McCarthy, were WWI veterans.

This condition was corrected by the tireless efforts of Col. Arthur S. Cowan, Commanding Officer of Fort Monmouth and Commandant of the Signal School, and Gen. George S. Gibbs, Chief Signal Officer, when a War Department announcement authorized the Signal Corps Band, effective 15 August 1930. The band was established by Act of Congress as a Special Army Band by the redesignation of the Thirteenth Cavalry Band as the Signal Corps Band, with station at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. The Signal Corps Bulletin No. 57, Nov-Dec 1930, "Timely Topics," stated "...This event was made possible by a combination of circumstances which were brought together by the necessity of rendering inactive an existing band organization and the ability to absorb for this purpose a small number of the additional grades and ratings recently authorized the Signal Corps...." (The

event was the mechanization of the 1st and 13th Cav as the 7th Cavalry Brigade. The 1st Cav Band remained with the Brigade.) Upon arrival of the band from Fort Riley, Kansas, the two bands were merged. The Corps now had its own official song and its own official band.

Unfortunately for the band members, the permanent barracks program at Fort Monmouth had not included permanent barracks for a band, so the Post Engineer had to condition one of the one-story WWI wooden buildings to accommodate them. Shortly after this was accomplished, the band was informed by the Band Commander (Post Adjutant) that they should be prepared for a visit from Mrs. Dawson Olmstead and others, to improve the Song of the Signal Corps. By this time, the band had become familiar with the piano score and the Army Band—Army Music School arrangement of the Song of the Signal Corps, adopted by the Signal Corps and published by the Adjutant General in the Army Song Book.

The meetings held sometime during late 1930 began with an explanation of the objectives to be accomplished in order to complete the Song of the Signal Corps as the "Signal Corps March." These objectives were discussed in detail

and the responsibility for completing the march, to include a complete military band arrangement, was assigned to WO Wheeler W. Sidwell, Bandleader, Signal Corps Band.

The participants included representatives from Headquarters Fort Monmouth and the Signal Corps Units at Fort Monmouth, the Bandleader and three or four principal musicians, and Mrs. Olmstead, who asked that in the future she be referred to as Bess Heath

Olmstead when referring to the Song of the Signal Corps or the Signal Corps March. Mrs. Olmstead was accompanied by Brig. Gen. R. J. Burt, Sr., composer of the song of the U. S. Infantry entitled, "The Infantry - Kings of the Highway," and who later wrote the original theme and words of the "Song of the Army Engineer."

The Office of the Chief Signal Officer had provided a compilation of the suggestions received in response to

General Saltzman's letter to each Signal Corps Officer, and General Burt gave an excellent analysis of the requirements of a good conventional military march.

Mr. Sidwell, who was an accomplished musician, as a member of the Duluth and Minneapolis Symphony Orchestras before his entry into the Service during WWI, was tasked with responsibility for converting the single chorus into a march for the Signal Corps. Bess Heath Olmstead would cooperate by providing revisions to the words of the song.

After approximately two (winter) months of diligent work by the members of the band, manuscripts of the completed march were photostatted by the laboratory photo section, and the march was ready for staffing. While most of the bandmen toiled to produce the handwritten manuscripts, SSgt. John R. Whiteside, solo trumpet player of the band, deserves credit for most of the additional musical composition. He also helped Mr. Sidwell do the arranging. This task gave the bandmen an opportunity to "gin-in" their ideas for what would become their signature march and theme song; and after only a few performances, the march was approved in the time it took for the mail to travel from New Jersey to Washington, D.C., and return.

There were no music typewriters or "copiers" in those days, and musicians often spent their waking hours copying music, some by ear at performances, to permit them to obtain music for their organizations. Copying music was a detestable duty for the average instrumentalist because it consumed so much time. The alternative in the Army was to buy printed music from the music publishing companies and if one had original music, to copyright it before having it printed in multiple copies for distribution. It was not customary for the Army to do this. It was done by the individual on a personal basis and, in many cases, without cost since the publisher sold the copies for profit. Desiring printed copies, and anticipating a need for Army-wide distribution of the Signal Corps March, it was concluded that the March should be copyrighted and, on 27 Feb 1931, the Signal Corps March was registered as an unpublished work under Class E, No. 35402, as "Military Band Parts - Signal Corps March," arranged by W. W. Sidwell, owner Bess Heath Olmstead, in Washington, D.C. But, alas, the Signal

Dedicated to the U S Signal Corps

Vocal Lead Sheet

Song Of The Signal Corps

Arranged by Mayhew Lake

Words and Music by
BESS HEATH OLMSTEAD

March (with spirit)

Shout out the slo-gan of the Sig - nal Corps: "Get the mes-sage through."

Fight till our en - e - mies can fight no more: That's what we've
got to do. We'll pack walk - ie - talk - ies and set up poles.

Splice up our ca - bles, shot full of holes. And don't try to stop us while we're
out to fight for the Red and the White and the Blue. When the
CHORUS dough-boys hike on the hard turn-pike, we'll be there to guide the way: -
- When the big guns roll t'ward their far off goal we will fol-low them day by
day From a thous-and sta-tions we call the na-tions from Green-land's
moun-tains to the South seashore For the sun can't set on our short wave net: That's the
While there's work to do, we will see it through: That's the
boast of the Sig - nal Corps. When you
pledge of the Sig - nal Corps.

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Corps Band was destined to hand-copy music for a long time. No further action was taken to publish either the song or the march. This was not a deterrent to performance, for being at Fort Monmouth we had special authority to use the photographic labs for reproductions when required. Although we played the march from memory, we needed extra copies to respond to requests received from time to time. The song and march were used for every occasion. It was characteristic of the band and was used for graduation exercises, on the air, at dances, for soldier shows, the National Horse Show, parades, baseball, basketball and football games and concerts. There was never any question about its official nature. The copyright question never surfaced, but the words of the song were seldom sung at Fort Monmouth, except for special ceremonies.

THE NEW DEAL AND THE EMERGENCY

(WWI Liberty and FWD trucks were junked and new Chevys were issued!)

By 1932-33, we were still using the tattered photostats of the Signal Corps March but with increasing numbers of performances, and still no one questioned the official status of the march or the song. It should be noted that the rallying cry of the Depression years, "Happy Days are Here Again," ran a close second to our theme song.

President Roosevelt's New Deal began in 1933 with the many changes, such as old age pensions and unemployment insurance legislation, and huge spending-lending programs.

The unrelated repeal of the Volstead Act in December of 1933 eliminated bootlegging and brought back 3.2 beer on the post.

Aside from not being paid several times, and a seemingly unfair arbitrary 33-1/3% reduction in military pay and allowances in the Spring of 1933 for an extended period, the majority of the personnel, military and civilian, considered themselves fortunate to be at Fort Monmouth. A favorite pastime of every communicator, to include many of the bandsmen during this period, was to work on discovering ways and means to beat "radio silence" during combat, and the elimination of wire and cable from the Signal Corps inventory. (Someone got lucky and thought up VHF and Microwave Radio Relay.)

In 1934, things began looking up; and by 1935, several new Signal Corps units were constituted, increasing the enlisted strength of 3,687. The officer strength dropped a few. Best of all for us, a new permanent band barracks was approved. Of course, other Army branches were improving also and requests for the Signal Corps March and Song of the Signal Corps were beginning to tax our photo lab.

Concurrent with some of the new military applications of radio and radar for aircraft warning, an expansion of the Army during the 1939-41 emergency brought unprecedented increases of personnel, signal units, equipment and facilities to Fort Monmouth, and a cadre of a second Signal Corps band was activated at Monmouth in the fall of 1940 for a Signal Corps Replacement Training Center. Conscription was bringing in outstanding musicians and both bands were literally bursting with talent. In addition, the initial establishment of the Training Film Studios drew most of the inducted "actors" to Monmouth. So, we had two superior Signal Corps bands and two superior Signal Corps orchestras using photostated Song of the Signal Corps and Signal Corps March music, and requests for copies from other expanding Army elements were mounting. Big names in the Motion Picture Industry and broadcasting and music worlds were daily visitors at Fort Monmouth. Fund drives for the USO (United Service Organization) had begun and the bands and orchestras were barnstorming to support the drive. An Army Emergency Relief soldier show, "Bottlenecks of '41," employing actors from the Training Film Studios and the Signal Corps bands, was a huge success with lots of original music. Brig. Gen. David Sarnoff, Sig C-USAR, Chairman of the Board, Radio Corporation of America (RCA), was a regular visitor and friend at Fort Monmouth. He had attended one of the showings of the "Bottlenecks of '41" and was impressed.

Expanded training activity and facilities at Fort Monmouth grew to the extent that satellite camps were planned. By 1 July 1941, the Signal Corps Officer Candidate School opened as the band stood in the quadrangle playing the Signal Corps March (from memory). Another significant event that took place on 1 July 1941 in NBC's television studio 3H — commercial



Bess Heath Olmstead wrote the words and music to the "Song of the Signal Corps" which was adopted by the Corps in 1927 as its official song. It was retired in 1961.

television was born. At exactly 1:29 PM, the familiar three notes of the NBC chimes signaled the beginning of commercial television in this country, as station WNBT (now WNBC-TV) signed on. The first event was from Ebbett's Field as the Brooklyn Dodgers played the Philadelphia Phillies and Ray Forrest provided the play-by-play report. For the evening program, members of the cast and the Signal Corps orchestra had been invited by Sarnoff to present excerpts from the "Bottlenecks of '41," in conjunction with a funding presentation to the Armed Forces for the USO. There were many other performers and performances and several commercials involved in that NBC station's historical program. The evening show was rehearsed in Studio 3H during the afternoon baseball telecast and was to start with the orchestra playing the Song of the Signal Corps as background for the opening announcement. When the program director asked if the song was copyrighted, he was told that it was and he refused to permit its use, even though we convinced him that the song had been dedicated to the Signal Corps by Mrs. Olmstead and that the Army had authority to use it any time. As an expedient, we decided that we would

write a fanfare after the rehearsal to replace the Signal Corps Song, which we did. As previously stated, that orchestra had talent. When we returned from dinner, we rehearsed the fanfare several times and by show time no one knew the difference in the program. As far as can be determined, this program was not recorded. That TV show was the last time the members of the cast and the orchestra performed together. Most were under orders to other units and stations as of 1 July 1941. I returned to my second day at Officer Candidate School, and the assistant orchestra leader departed for new duties as a bandleader. The copyright incident was probably never reported to Mrs. Olmstead, the headquarters staff at Fort Monmouth, or the Chief Signal Officer.

WORLD WAR II AND KOREA

By the end of 1941, the United States was at war and total mobilization began. The Signal Corps Replacement Training Center at Camp Crowder, Missouri, had been activated and centers in California were to be constructed. The time was at hand to

contract for the publication of the Song of the Signal Corps and, in 1942, Bess Heath Olmstead "assigned" the copyright of the "Song of the Signal Corps" to Sam Fox Publishing Company, New York, N.Y. This included the Signal Corps March arrangement by W. W. Sidwell. The song would now get the full commercial treatment and world-wide distribution. The 1942 agreement with Sam Fox Publishing Company does not affect Mrs. Olmstead's agreement granting the Signal Corps of the United States Army the right to use the musical composition in any manner in connection with its operation and official functions; and an agreement between Twentieth Century-Fox, Inc. and Mrs. Olmstead for use of the composition in a motion picture to be distributed throughout the United States of America, its possessions and all foreign countries; an agreement between the Radio Corporation of America and Mrs. Olmstead covering record No. 27814-B; and Mrs. Olmstead reserved the right to personally perform the Song of the Signal Corps or parts thereof.

In 1943, Sam Fox Publishing Company copyrighted and released a new sheet music version of the Song of the Signal Corps, complete with an introduction, verse, and chorus, in a lower key, with letter and chord diagrams, dedicated to the United States Signal Corps. And a stirring march arrangement by Mayhew Lake, entitled "Song of the Signal Corps," was dedicated to the U.S. Signal Corps (all rights reserved, including public performance for profit).

The RCA Victor album of Service Songs contains the Song of the Signal Corps March as the flip side of the Marine's Hymn. It is recorded by the RCA Victor Band, conducted by Leonard Joy, with the Four Clubmen (No. 27814-B).

The Twentieth Century-Fox record TCF 163 is a recording of the Twentieth Century-Fox Orchestra and Chorus, conducted by Alfred Newman. This recording was used to introduce the musical background of the first war film, entitled "At the Front," giving a pictorial account of the opening phases

"Official preferred" song for the Signal Corps



At least two other widely recognized Signal Corps songs exist, both of which have been published in TAC. The first, which appeared in our Summer 1977 issue, is Lorraine X Page's "US Army Signal Corps." The other is Allan Woolley's composition, "The US Army Signal Corps March," which appeared in the Summer 1979 issue of TAC.

When Bess Heath Olmstead's "Song of the Signal Corps" (see page 6) was retired in 1961, a search for a new song was begun. The new song, it was decided, should honor the Army Signal Corps, its mission and the men and women who serve.

A professional group from the combined Armed Services School of Music and the Army Signal Corps

THE U.S. ARMY SIGNAL CORPS MARCH

*Interlude on the adjacent page

Musical notation and arrangement by Allan Woolley in honor of the U.S. Army Signal Corps. All rights reserved. The U.S. Government.

of fighting by U. S. forces in North Africa.

The commercial publication of the Song of the Signal Corps did not in any respect alter its official status. In fact, it just consolidated all developments and changes into a single package. The tremendous distribution of the music and recordings, as well as the regular use of the song in training films and recruiting films, together with the rapidly expanding Army and war activities, not to mention the constant turnover of bandleaders and command staffs or the transfer of Signal Corps Bands to the Adjutant General's Corps with numerical designations, gave rise to a concept that the "Song of the Signal Corps" was just another commercial war song, like say - George M. Cohan's "Over There." This concept is evident in an official Signal Corps letter from Fort Monmouth to Mrs. Olmstead in January 1949, posing a question to her about the "official" status of her song, instead of resorting to the official files of the War Department or Department of the Army. It is true, she had no official correspondence from the War

Department or Department of the Army about her song's "adoption," and she could not answer the question, which was probably prompted by the need to obtain copyright releases at times to perform her song on radio and TV. It can be reported that Mrs. Olmstead purposely avoided becoming too involved in official Army channels pertaining to her song.

Few communicators of the 1941-61 era had knowledge of the historical background of the "Regimental Songs" program or that songs, like units, have a lineage. There were too many other pressing operational problems for such detail. But you can be assured that the "Song of the Signal Corps March" did its job and did it well. It flourished during WWII and the Korean Conflict, and beyond, as the official adopted song or march. Its lineage should include 18 hash-stripes, all the service medals that have been struck since 1939, and 53 years of history. Its military precedence is formidable. In addition, it has a vociferous alumnus.

Besides all of this, it's a very good march (which is "out of print").

ENDNOTES

1. Baker, F. C., *How We Hear — The Psychological Aspects of Music*. G. Schirmer, N.Y., N.Y.
2. Dolph, Edward A., *Sound Off — Soldier Songs from The Revolution to World War II*. Farrar & Rinehart Inc., N.Y., N.Y.



Lt. Col. Gustave E. Vitt has had a long and interesting career. He is a fourth generation Army Bandleader. The tradition began with his great-grandfather who was appointed Bandleader to the 8th Infantry Regiment at Ft. Thomas, Kentucky, in 1853. Vitt graduated from the Army Music School as a PFC in 1927 and joined the 13th Cavalry Band, where he served until it became the Signal Corps Band in August 1930. As a MSgt., he became Bandleader in 1940. On 1 July 1941, he became the very first musician ever to appear on television. The camera focuses on his chevrons before pulling back to reveal the entire band which then played a short program. In the same year, he left the band to enter OCS where he was part of the first Signal Corps class. He was a personal friend of Bess Heath Olmstead and her husband Maj. Gen. Dawson Olmstead. Now retired, Vitt lives in Virginia.



Martial music, with its appropriate rhythm, idealistic lyric, and inspiring melody, has traditionally performed a major role in the manifestation of unit pride and integrity, competitive proficiency toward excellence, and self-dedication to purpose in all the armies of the world — from the bawdy songs of Caesar's armies during campaigns of the Gallic War (58 to 52 B.C.) to the present time.

Traditions Committee were the judges. Woolley's song was selected from the eight submissions.

The "US Army Signal Corps March" became the "official preferred"

song for the corps. Though the march does not take precedence over the official Army song, it is used on occasions when distinctive Signal Corps music is appropriate and as background

music in certain films produced by the Signal Corps.

Woolley's march has been recorded by the US Army Band and the US Army chorus.